



West Australian
Symphony Orchestra

DIE FLEDERMAUS

Friday 14 & Saturday 15 March 2025, 7.30pm
Winthrop Hall, The University of Western Australia



West Australian Symphony Orchestra respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and Elders of Country throughout Western Australia, and the Whadjuk Noongar people on whose lands we work and share music.

SPECIAL EVENT

Die Fledermaus

Johann STRAUSS II *Die Fledermaus*

Act 1 (60 mins)

Interval (25 mins)

Acts 2 & 3 (90 mins)

Asher Fisch conductor
Paul O'Neill Gabriel von Eisenstein
Rachelle Durkin Rosalinde
Jessica Blunt Adele
Andrew Goodwin Alfred
Samuel Dundas Dr Falke
Stuart Laing Dr Blind
Warwick Fyfe Frank
Ruth Burke Prince Orlofsky
Michael Loney narrator/Frosch
WASO Chorus

Listen to WASO

This performance is recorded for broadcast on Sunday 13 April, 1pm (AWST) on ABC Classic. Date subject to change. For further details visit abc.net.au/classic

Asher Fisch appears courtesy of Wesfarmers Arts. Libretto by C. Haffner and R. Genée after Meilhac and Halévy. English Dialogue translated, collated, abridged, and written by Andrew Foote. Dramatic narration and spoken dialogue performed in English. Sung in German with English surtitles.

Digital Concert Program & Wesfarmers Pre-concert Talk

In 2025, pre-concert talks will be delivered digitally, allowing you to listen to the talk before and after the concert — as many times as you like!

Access exclusive content, learn about the music from our digital pre-concert talk with speaker Andrew Foote, and get our concert program at your fingertips.

Simply open your smartphone's camera app and hover the camera over the QR code to access the *Die Fledermaus* digital program.



Wesfarmers Arts
Principal Partner

WASO On Stage

VIOLIN

Laurence Jackson

Concertmaster

Riley Skevington

Assoc Concertmaster

Semra Lee

Assistant Concertmaster

Alexandra Isted

Principal 1st Violin

Zak Rowntree*

Principal 2nd Violin

Kylie Liang

Assoc Principal 2nd Violin

Kate Sullivan

Assistant Principal 2nd Violin

Sarah Blackman

Stephanie Dean

Amy Furfaro

Rebecca Glorie

Beth Hebert

Emma Hunt

William Huxtable

Kathryn Lee

Sera Lee

Andrea Mendham

Lucas O'Brien

Melanie Pearn

Louise Sandercock

Jane Serrangeli

Cerys Tooby

Samantha

Wickramasinghe

VIOLA

Daniel Schmitt

Kierstan Arkleysmith

Nik Babic

Benjamin Caddy

Alison Hall

Rachael Kirk

James Munro

Elliot O'Brien

Helen Tuckey

CELLO

Eve Silver

Jeremy Garside

Shigeru Komatsu

Andrew Leask

Oliver McAslan

Nicholas Metcalfe

Fotis Skordas

DOUBLE BASS

Andrew Sinclair*

Robin Brawley

Christine Reitzenstein

Mark Tooby

Giovanni Vinci

FLUTE

Andrew Nicholson

PICCOLO

Sonia Croucher

OBOE

Liz Chee

Acting Principal Oboe

COR ANGLAIS

Jonathan Ryan

CLARINET

Allan Meyer

Som Howie

BASSOON

Adam Mikulicz

Acting Principal Bassoon

CONTRABASSOON

Kina Lin-Wilmoth°

HORN

David Evans

Eve McEwen

Julia Brooke

Francesco Lo Surdo

TRUMPET

Jenna Smith

Peter Miller

TROMBONE

Joshua Davis

Liam O'Malley

Jeremy Alderson°

TIMPANI

François Combémoré

Assoc Principal

Percussion & Timpani

PERCUSSION

Brian Maloney

Robyn Gray^

Tegan LeBrun^

HARP

Kira Gunn^

KEY

Principal

Associate Principal

Assistant Principal

Contract Musicians°

Guest Musicians^

Correct at time of printing. * Instruments used by these musicians are on loan from Janet Holmes à Court AC. We greatly appreciate the support of our musicians' Duet partners, acknowledged on page 18.

West Australian Symphony Orchestra

Engage | Excite | Experience | Educate

From the centre of Perth to the furthest corners of the state, we have provided the soundtrack to life in WA since 1928.

As the State Orchestra, Perth's first and finest, WASO is the largest employer of performing artists in Western Australia and reaches two million people with musical experiences each year on stage, in our community, and online.

From concert stages to classrooms, hospitals to aged care, we bring joy, inspire learning, and nurture participation in our community, because everybody deserves the opportunity to experience live music. Every year, through community and leading industry partnerships, we engage a new generation of young and emerging artists to help secure a bright future for music in Australia.

We celebrate our rich classical music heritage with great artists from all over the world and commission and perform new repertoire to renew and expand it.

The Orchestra collaborates widely with major arts companies and independent artists, performing opera to ballet, movies to musicals, jazz to rock.

Asher Fisch is Principal Conductor and Artistic Adviser of our Orchestra. We champion the diversity of music in all its forms, with a team of talented and passionate people who create unforgettable experiences for all West Australians to enjoy.

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About the Artists

Asher Fisch

Principal Conductor & Artistic Adviser

Asher Fisch is a renowned conductor celebrated for his interpretative mastery of the core German and Italian repertoire of the Romantic and post-Romantic eras. Equally accomplished in both the operatic and symphonic realms, his repertoire spans from Haydn to contemporary works by living composers. Since 2014, he has been the Principal Conductor & Artistic Adviser of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra (WASO), making him the Orchestra's longest-serving Principal Conductor. His previous positions include Principal Guest Conductor of the Seattle Opera (2007–2013), Music Director of the New Israeli Opera (1998–2008), and Music Director of the Wiener Volksoper (1995–2000).

Born in Israel, Fisch began his career as Daniel Barenboim's assistant and Kappellmeister at the Berlin Staatsoper. He has since conducted at major opera houses worldwide, including the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Vienna Staatsoper, Teatro alla Scala, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, and Semperoper Dresden. His symphonic engagements have included leading prestigious orchestras such as the Berlin Philharmonic, Munich Philharmonic, London Symphony Orchestra, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, and Orchestre National de France, as well as top American orchestras in Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, New York, and Philadelphia.

In 2023, Asher Fisch was appointed Music Director of the Tiroler Festspiele in Erl, Austria, where he collaborates with the festival's General Manager, celebrated tenor Jonas Kaufmann. Their inaugural season premiered in December 2024. The festival, held three times annually, features a diverse program of orchestral and operatic



performances, chamber music, and Lied. Known for its dedication to the works of Richard Wagner, the Tiroler Festspiele will present *Parsifal* during Easter 2025, with Fisch conducting and Kaufmann in the title role. Each year will see the addition of a new Wagner opera production.

In 2025, Fisch's engagements include *La Bohème*, Wagner's *Parsifal*, and three Verdi operas at the Tiroler Festspiele, Verdi's *Il Trovatore* with the West Australian Opera, Britten's *War Requiem* in Düsseldorf, among other performances. Recent highlights include Reimann's *Lear* at Teatro Real de Madrid, *Carmen* at the Vienna Staatsoper, and *Dialogues des Carmélites* at the Israeli Opera.

Fisch's award-winning discography includes Bruckner's Symphony No.8, Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, and tenor Stuart Skelton's debut solo album *Shining Knight*, all recorded with WASO. His critically acclaimed releases also feature Ravel's *L'Heure Espagnole* with the Munich Radio Orchestra and the complete Brahms symphonies with WASO, released on ABC Classic. His two recordings of Wagner's *Ring* cycle — with the Seattle Opera and the State Opera of South Australia — garnered widespread acclaim, with the latter winning ten Helpmann Awards, including Best Opera and Best Music Direction.

In addition to his conducting achievements, Fisch is an accomplished pianist. His solo recording of Wagner piano transcriptions for the Melba label showcases his versatility and artistry.

Asher Fisch appears courtesy of Wesfarmers Arts.

About the Artists



Paul O'Neill
Gabriel von Eisenstein

Australian tenor Paul O'Neill has forged a compelling international career singing in opera houses and concert halls throughout Europe and Australasia. In 2024, he sang The Prince (*Rusalka*) for West Australian Opera and as a soloist with the Melbourne, West Australian and New Zealand Symphony Orchestras. Other recent engagements include Pinkerton (*Madama Butterfly*) and Alfredo (*La traviata*) for Opera Australia, Macduff (*Macbeth*) for State Opera South Australia, and Don José (*Carmen*), Cavaradossi (*Tosca*), Alfredo, Rodolfo (*La bohème*), Turiddu (*Cavalleria rusticana*), Canio (*Pagliacci*) and Otello for West Australian Opera. He was the tenor soloist in Britten's *War Requiem* and Siegmund in *Die Walküre* for West Australian Symphony Orchestra. In 2025, he sings Pinkerton and Manrico (*Il trovatore*) for WA Opera and returns to Opera Australia in Verdi Gala concerts.

He has sung Don José at the Glyndebourne Festival, Laca in Jenůfa and Janáček's song cycle *The Diary of One Who Disappeared* for Opéra de Lille, the title role in *Faust* at Theater Hagen and the Mainz State Theatre, Rodolfo for Halle Opera, Elvino (*La sonnambula*) and Laca with Graz Opera, Radamès in *Aida* at the St Margarethen Opera Festival, The Prince in *Rusalka* at the State Theatre of Saarbrücken and Isepo in *La Gioconda* in concert at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam.



Rachelle Durkin
Rosalinde

Australian/American soprano Rachelle Durkin became an established solo artist at The Metropolitan Opera, singing principal roles for many years – most notably Norina in *Don Pasquale* (recorded live for Sirius Radio), Lisa in *La sonnambula*, Clorinda in *La Cenerentola*, Miss Schlesen in Phillip Glass' *Satyagraha*, Frasquita in *Carmen*, Masha in *Pique Dame*, First Flower Maiden in *Parsifal* and Young Girl in *Moses und Aron*.

In recent seasons, she has sung Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* in Hawai'i and with Pittsburgh Opera, Mrs Schlesen with Opera Australia, Violetta in *La traviata* for Victory Hall Opera, the title role in *Tosca* for Opera Queensland, Tytania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and The Governess (*The Turn of the Screw*) in Adelaide, Morgana (*Alcina*) in Canberra and Musetta (*La bohème*) in Perth. In concert, she appeared with the Sydney, Tasmanian and West Australian Symphony Orchestras. She returns to Opera Australia in 2025 as Musetta in their Sydney Winter Season of *La bohème*.

Other highlights have included *Romance at the Met - Opera's Most Romantic Moments*, soprano soloist in Beethoven's Symphony No.9 with Detroit Symphony Orchestra (c: Leonard Slatkin) and West Australian Symphony Orchestra (c: Asher Fisch), and Gala Concerts with Plácido Domingo, Bryn Terfel and José Carreras.



Jessica Blunt
Adele

Jessica is a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music, London and the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. In 2022, Jessica sang with the English National Opera at the London Coliseum and at the Stimme, Leib und Seele (SLS) program in Salzburg, Austria, where she studied with conductor Jennifer Condon and singers including Stuart Skelton and Daniela Sindram. Following this, she coached with répétiteur Jendrik Springer at the Vienna State Opera.

Operatic roles include: Belinda/First Witch (Purcell: *Dido and Aeneas*, West Australian Opera), Lucy (Menotti: *The Telephone*, West Australian Opera), Lucia (Donizetti: *Lucia Di Lammermoor*, role study for Opera Queensland's Bel Canto Festival), Countess (Mozart: *Le nozze di Figaro*, Mediterranean Opera Studio & Festival), and First Lady (Mozart: *Die Zauberflöte*, Manhattan Opera Studio).

She has performed as a soloist in New York's Carnegie Hall, Sydney Town Hall and Perth Concert Hall, and, locally, has been guest soloist for the UWA Choral Society, West Coast Philharmonic Orchestra, and the 2024 Vienna Pops New Year's Eve Gala. She has performed in the chorus with Opera Australia and West Australian Opera. In early 2025, Jessica returned to SLS in Austria to work with coloratura soprano Brenda Rae, supported by West Australian Opera's Roberts Emerging Artist Fund. She is a 2024/2025 Wesfarmers Arts Young Artist with West Australian Opera.



Andrew Goodwin
Alfred

Andrew Goodwin has appeared with opera companies in Europe, the UK, Asia and Australia, including the Bolshoi Opera, Gran Theatre Liceu Barcelona, Teatro Real Madrid, La Scala Milan, Opera Australia, Pinchgut Opera and Sydney Chamber Opera. He has performed with the St Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra, Moscow and Melbourne Chamber Orchestras, all the Australian Symphony orchestras, and has given recitals at Wigmore Hall, Oxford Lieder, and major Australian music festivals.

This year, Andrew returns to WASO for Stanhope's *Mahāsāgar*, Four Winds Festival, Adelaide Festival, Victoria Chorale (*Creation*), Adelaide Symphony (Mozart's Requiem), Sydney Chamber Choir (Bach Mass in B minor), and Brisbane Chamber Choir and Melbourne Symphony (*Messiah*).

Recent engagements include Renaud in Stravinsky's *The Nightingale* and other fables (Adelaide Festival); the Narr in Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder* (Sydney Symphony); Mozart's Requiem (Sydney Philharmonia, MSO, TSO, QSO); Evangelist, St. Matthew Passion (Melbourne Bach Choir); Haydn's *Creation* (Australian Haydn Ensemble); *Messiah* (Canberra, Melbourne, Queensland, New Zealand Symphony Orchestras); Mills' *Nativity* (ASO), and *Carmina burana* (MSO, also in Singapore).

Andrew studied voice at the St. Petersburg Conservatory and in the UK, and is the winner of many scholarships including the Tait Memorial Trust Scholarship, the Martin Bequest Travelling Scholarship, the Sir Robert Askin Operatic Travelling Scholarship, and the Australian Opera Auditions Committee Joan Sutherland Richard Bonyngne Scholarship.

About the Artists



Samuel Dundas
Dr Falke

Samuel Dundas regularly appears with all the major Australian and New Zealand opera companies, symphony orchestras and choral societies. Major role debuts this year are Dandini (*La Cenerentola*) for Opera Queensland, Sharpless (*Madama Butterfly*) for West Australian Opera, and Figaro (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*) for Opera Australia. Samuel also returns to Opera Queensland and New Zealand Opera for Marcello (*La bohème*), to the Sydney Symphony for Beethoven's Symphony No.9 (Simone Young conducting), and to the Tasmanian Symphony (Christmas Gala).

Last year, Samuel returned to both the Perth and Brisbane Festivals and to Victorian Opera as Cave (*Eucalyptus*: Jonathan Mills), to Opera Australia as Horatio (*Hamlet*), to Opera Queensland as Enrico (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), to the Queensland and West Australian Symphony Orchestras in Beethoven 9, and to the Tasmanian Symphony in Haydn's *Harmony Mass*. He was also a featured soloist at the Coriole Festival.

Further recent major roles have included the title role in Richard Mills' *Galileo*; Wolfram (*Tannhäuser*) for Opera Australia; the Count (*Capriccio*) for Victorian Opera; Donner (*Das Rheingold*) for Sydney Symphony Orchestra; Aphron (*The Golden Cockerel*) for Adelaide Festival; the title role in Voss for State Opera South Australia, and Count Carl Magnus Malcolm (*A Little Night Music*) for Victorian Opera.



Stuart Laing
Dr Blind

Stuart Laing's most recent performances include The Gamekeeper in *Rusalka* for West Australian Opera and Leo in *The Caretaker* for Breaksea. Before returning to Perth in 2023, he spent 14 years performing across the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Stuart was a full-time member of the Opera North chorus, contributing to over 50 productions, 20 tours, and performing or covering more than 30 roles. His roles with Opera North include Remendado (*Carmen*), Lensky (*Eugene Onegin*), Beppe (*Pagliacci*), Daniel Buchanan (*Street Scene*), Tinca (*Il tabarro*), and Mr. Erlanson (*A Little Night Music*). Elsewhere in the UK, Stuart performed Jacquino (*Fidelio*) and Delil (*Giovanna d'Arco*) at Buxton Festival Opera, and the Master of Ceremonies and Tchaplinsky (*The Queen of Spades*) for Grange Park Opera. In Ireland, he sang Tinca (*Il tabarro*) at the National Opera House in Wexford.

At the Guildhall Opera School in London, Stuart performed Stage Manager (*Our Town*), Lysander (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), and Spärlisch (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*). As a Young Artist with West Australian Opera, he sang Nick (*La fanciulla del West*), Horace Adams (*Peter Grimes*), and Basilio and Don Curzio (*Le nozze di Figaro*).

In concert, Stuart has showcased a diverse repertoire spanning Baroque to contemporary works, including Richard Mills' *Passion According to St Mark* with WASO.



Warwick Fyfe

Frank

Warwick Fyfe is a Helpmann Award-winning singer and is considered one of Australia's finest baritones.

Recent appearances include Wotan/*Wanderer (Der Ring des Nibelungen)* for Melbourne Opera, Sancho Panza (*Don Quichotte*), Amonasro (*Aida*), Alberich (*Der Ring des Nibelungen*), Barone di Trombonok (*Il viaggio a Reims*) and Klingsor (*Parsifal*) for Opera Australia, Alberich (*Das Rheingold*) for the Japan Philharmonic and Tianjin Symphony Orchestras, Peter (*Hansel and Gretel*) in Singapore, Athanaël (*Thaïs*) and Amonasro for Finnish National Opera, Bartolo (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*) for Victorian Opera, Scarpia (*Tosca*) for West Australian Opera, Wotan (*Die Walküre*) in Singapore and Melbourne, Pizarro (*Fidelio*) in Melbourne and Perth, Bottom (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) in Adelaide and Beethoven's *Symphony No.9* for the Melbourne Symphony.

2024 appearances included Scarpia with Opera Australia, Vodnik (*Rusalka*) with West Australian Opera and *Gurreleider* with the Sydney Symphony. In 2025, he makes his debut as Hans Sachs (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*) for Melbourne Opera, sings Vodnik in *Rusalka* for Opera Australia and Alberich (*Siegfried*) in concert performances for Sydney Symphony.

Concert engagements include performances with the Sydney, Melbourne, Queensland, West Australian, Adelaide, Tasmanian, Warsaw and Singapore Symphony Orchestras, Orchestra of the Music Makers (Singapore), the Auckland Philharmonia, Sydney Philharmonia and the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic.



Ruth Burke

Prince Orlofsky

Ruth Burke is an Irish-Australian mezzo-soprano. Ruth graduated from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts in 2022 and is currently a 2024/25 Wesfarmers Young Artist with West Australian Opera (WAO). In 2024, Ruth made her principal artist debut in WAO's production of *Dido and Aeneas* singing the roles of Second Woman and Second Witch. This year, Ruth will be singing the role of Kate Pinkerton with West Australian Opera.

Ruth has also performed as the mezzo-soloist with Darwin Symphony Orchestra in Beethoven 9 in 2022. Ruth has performed the roles of Rosina in *Barber of Seville* (Schools tour), Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel*, La Zelartrice in *Suor Angelica*, La Ciesca in *Gianni Schicchi* and Dangeville in *Adriana Lecouvreur* with Freeze Frame Opera.

In 2024/25, Ruth travelled to Austria to study at Stimme, Leib und Seele where she studied the role of Der Komponist in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, working with conductor Jennifer Condon, as well as guest artists. In 2024, Ruth was selected as a semi-finalist in the IFAC Australian Singing Competition and received the Tinkler award.

About the Artists



Michael Loney
Narrator/Frosch

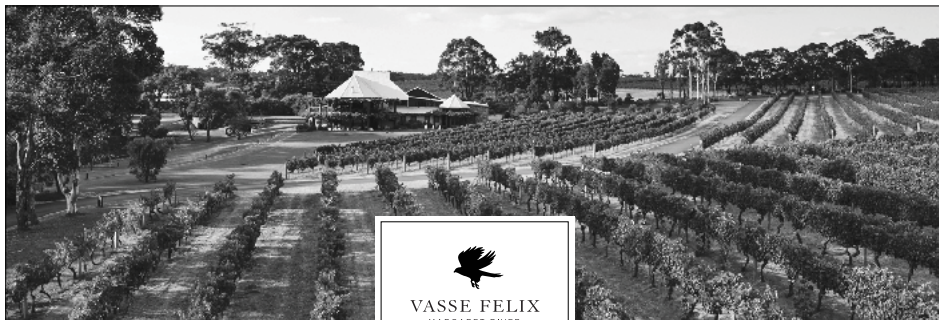
Perth-born Michael completed an English Degree at Curtin University (then WAIT) in 1977 before training at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School in England (1980-82) with the aid of a Rotary Foundation Scholarship. Work in Britain includes seasons in Shakespeare, repertoire at the Pitlochry Festival in Scotland, and on TV in *Coronation Street* and *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (Granada TV), and *Howards' Way*, *Tenko* and *Sorry* (BBC). Since returning to Perth in 1988, Michael has worked with all the major companies in WA. He has also appeared in seven seasons of *Shakespeare in the Park* in King's Park, his favourite part being Bottom

in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which he played twice.

Michael has been nominated five times for Best Actor at the Equity Awards, won the inaugural award in 2000 for *Speaking in Tongues*, and, in 2010, the award for Best Supporting Actor for his performance as Leonato in *Much Ado About Nothing* for Black Swan State Theatre Company. He has also appeared in the television series *Ship to Shore*, *Minty*, *Circuit 11*, the mini-series *Cloudstreet*, and as Judge Heenan in *The Great Mint Swindle*.

Michael has directed a number of productions including *You've got that thing! A tribute to Cole Porter*; *Exactly like You*, *The Magic of Dorothy Fields*; *Fancy Meeting You*, *a Tribute to Harold Arlen*; and *The Catalinas of Crawley Bay*, about the famous flying boats stationed in Perth during World War II and The Snake Pit, the beginning of Rock and Roll in WA at Scarborough Beach in the 1950s.

For West Australian Opera Company, Michael has performed in *The Merry Widow* and *Carmen*.



VASSE FELIX
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About the Artists

WASO Chorus

The WASO Chorus was formed in 1988 and consists of over 100 volunteer choristers who represent the finest form of community music-making, bringing together singers from all walks of life. They regularly feature in the WASO annual concert season and are directed by Hugh Lydon.

The Chorus has built an international reputation for its high standards and diverse range of repertoire. While its main role is to perform with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra, the Chorus also maintains a profile of solo concerts, tours and community engagements.

The Chorus sings with the finest conductors and soloists including Asher Fisch, Simone Young, Stephen Layton and Paul Daniel. Recent highlights have included Britten's *War Requiem* and Verdi's *Requiem*. In 2019, the Chorus performed at the Denmark Festival of



Voice and, in 2018, toured China with performances of Orff's *Carmina burana*.

In 2020, they performed two Gala events on the Kalbarri Skywalk. In 2023, the chorus was invited to Hobart to perform Brahms' *German Requiem* with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra (TSO), the TSO chorus, Sydney Philharmonia Choirs and members of the public, conducted by Simon Halsey.

Hugh Lydon
Chorus Director

Gladys Chua
Répétiteur

WASO Chorus On Stage

SOPRANO

Anna Börner
Penelope Colgan
Clara Connor
Rachel Doulton
Fay Edwards
Marion Funke
Kylie Grima
Diane Hawkins
Deborah
Jackson-Porteous
Joanna Killgore
Gillian King
Cassidy Shelton
Kate Sugars
Carol Unkovich
Alicia Walter
Charmaine de Witt

ALTO

Marian Agombar
Lisa Barz
Llewela Benn
Helen Brown
Patsy Brown
Catherine Dunn
Kaye Fairbairn
Susanna Fleck
Louise Hayes
Jill Jones
Emma Lejonberg
Lynne Naylor
Deborah Piesse
Neb Ryland
Moir Westmore
Jacquie Wright

TENOR

Chris Bedding
Nick Fielding
Alan Harvey
Matthew Reardon
Christopher Ryland
Sim Taylor
Stephen Turley
Malcolm Vernon

BASS

Justin Audcent
Ken Gasmier
Benjamin Lee
Adam Lynch
Geoff Massey
Peter Ormond
Jim Rhoads
Steve Sherwood
Chris Smith
Michael Whitby
Andrew Wong

About the Music

Johann STRAUSS II *Die Fledermaus*

A Timeless Operetta of Wit and Revelry

Early-1800s Vienna was a city mostly based upon agriculture and trade. At this time, diverse entertainments for the upper middle class were salon-based, with larger concerts usually devised under the banner of music societies such as the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* (Society of Friends of Music), and often for the benefit of a composer, performer, or member. Following a period of political instability in the first two decades of the century, the city transitioned towards bustling industrialisation accompanied by an increasing population. With the rise of the middle class, the demand for regular public events having a broader patronage grew rapidly.

Johann Strauss Senior, a gifted composer, violinist, and orchestra leader, capitalised upon these changes, and developed musical events such as concerts and dances that the rising numbers of the middle class could access and enjoy — and that also ensured his own popularity. Dance music, and in particular waltzes, became increasingly in demand for cafes, balls, and even within theatrical entertainments. As Egon Gartenberg states, “As the minuet, the gavotte and sarabande breathed their last gentle sighs, the mazurka and quadrille might briefly intrude, but it was the waltz that was to reign supreme — a peasant dance elevated to an art form by the grace of its rhythm and melody.”

Strauss discouraged his three sons from pursuing musical interests, but his eldest, Johann Strauss II, secretly undertook lessons in violin and composition with



the support of his mother. While pursuing his work as a bank clerk, he developed his skills as a composer and was granted a licence to perform with his small orchestra in the 1840s — to his father’s chagrin. Despite mixed early success, it was not until the younger Strauss toured and later returned to Vienna that the sheer output and “hum-ability” of his tunes gave rise to his informal title as “The Waltz King.”

This success, and perhaps his own inexperience, may have been the reason that Strauss avoided writing music for theatrical works. However, his first wife Henrietta “Jetty” Treffz, a mezzo-soprano, actress, and astute business partner, had previously encouraged the director of the Theater an der Wien, Maximilian Steiner, to cobble together some of Strauss’ stand-alone compositions into shows; *Indigo und die vierzig Räuber* (1871), and *Der Karneval in Rom* (1873). Strauss was at first reluctant to progress these works, as he had clear views as to how his music should be performed. Notwithstanding these being modest successes with audiences, the local press tended to agree that a man of Strauss’ reputation should never have allowed his name to

be associated with such endeavours, as they compromised his high-quality dance music by overlaying it with lesser quality lyrics and characters.

The *Komische Operette* — comical little opera, or operetta, and describing a form of opera in which spoken dialogue replaced recitative and musical numbers were memorably tuneful — was a developing artform which had its roots in works such as Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*). Operettas were intended to entertain, and to promote feelings of sentiment, comedy, and romance. Unlike grand operas, they were performed in privately owned theatres, were attended by a wide social spectrum, had elements of improvisation, often featured cross-dressing by the characters, and were afforded more lenient censorship — meaning that more lascivious themes could be explored.

Above all, they were public entertainments, and were expected to turn a handsome profit for the theatre management and creative team. This latter aspect is perhaps why operettas have been deemed less important by musical historians or some “serious musicians,” and may also explain why such luminaries as Offenbach, Gilbert and Sullivan, and Strauss have been consigned to a class of “lesser” music. In the words of Alfred Grünwald, librettist to Franz Lehár, Emmerich Kálmán, and others:

“What we must recognise is that operetta is a distinct art form, and a very important one, in view of its unquestioned universal popularity. It was born, it grew up, developed, reached heights now already regarded as classical, passed through an occasional period of decline, [and] was reborn again: that is, it has a history, just as drama and opera have.”

While dance music remained Strauss' chief interest and the primary reason for his popularity, he completed 13 complete operettas from 1871, preceded by two incomplete works. In 1874, and at the urging of Steiner, he reviewed a libretto of *Die Fledermaus* (*The Bat*) by Richard Genée, who had collaborated with him on some lyrics for *Karneval in Rom* the previous year. The libretto had a chequered history: originally a farce by German playwright Julius Roderich Benedix (1851), appropriated into a French three-act vaudeville *Le Réveillon* (*New Year's Eve*) (1872), translated back to German by Karl Haffner, and revised and completed by Genée.

Strauss may have been interested in attempting an operetta for a third time for a few reasons. First, Jacques Offenbach had previously encouraged Strauss, when they met in 1864, to turn his attention to operetta. Offenbach's operettas (or *opera bouffe* or *opéra-comique* as he preferred them called) were experiencing great commercial and artistic success. Second, the 1873 financial crash may have provided impetus for Strauss to consider a work of escapism for audiences, and perhaps also for financial reasons. Third, Genée had been working with Offenbach, which may have attached credibility to his libretto (Genée was also to complete much of the orchestration).

For whatever reasons, at the age of 49, and across a six-month period in 1874, Strauss wrote *Die Fledermaus*. The work included the repurposed concert aria *Csárdás* for the character Rosalinde, and blended waltzes, polkas, and arias into a cohesive, lively operetta. In 1894, the Vienna Court Opera elevated the status of *Die Fledermaus* to “opera” by hosting a production.

To an audience of 1874 Vienna, the characters and plot of *Die Fledermaus* would have been recognisable as de facto “stock” characters employed in *commedia dell’arte*, albeit in Viennese form, that poked fun at themselves, their peers, the acceptable norms of society, and the world at large. Within *Die Fledermaus*, the characters and their dispositions include: outsiders (Alfredo who, being an Italian, can of course only sing operatic arias and seduce women); social mismatches (the maid Adele and the prison director Frank dressing up and trying to fit in at a high society ball); marital infidelities (the well-to-do couple Gabriel and Rosalinde von Eisenstein, who aim to keep up appearances while ‘managing’ their relationship); revenge (Falke appearing charming while being clearly disgruntled); vanity and indolence of wealth (the Russian Prince Orlovsky, whose motto is “each to their own”); and above all, that dancing, jollity, and drinking champagne can solve anything!

As the original French version *Le Réveillon* — a long dinner held in the evening preceding Christmas Day and New Year’s Eve — was not considered suitable for Vienna, Genée devised Act II to occur at a grand masked ball held on New Year’s Eve at the turn of the century. (An interesting side note is that the work has been performed every New Year’s Eve in Vienna since about 1900). Off-stage, the masked ball was a common event and allowed the socialites of Vienna to mingle in a way that permitted anonymity, and to engage in behaviours that would otherwise not be acceptable. Strauss had performed at many such events during his career as a dance orchestra conductor. On-stage, the masked ball offered the opportunity to disrupt the social order, and provided the perfect vehicle for

Falke’s revenge to be played out. Viennese audiences were drawn to operettas because these works mirrored the dynamics of their own social circles, and they delighted in the appealing melodies, spirited dance sequences, and humorous situations. The predictable ending with resolution of the characters’ moral or social transgressions being reconciled, and where all were returned to an established social order, provided a reassuring narrative that aligned with the audience’s need for a sense of escapism, and comfort to provide relief from the stresses of daily life. In *Die Fledermaus*, most of the principal characters adopt disguises during Act II to impersonate members of a higher social class. However, by the conclusion of the operetta they joyfully return to their original roles and social status. Allied with some of Strauss’ most enduring melodies, there is a reason to smile and say, “And they all lived happily ever after.”

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Get tickets to your next WASO experience at the WASO Mobile Box Office located inside the Winthrop Hall foyer. The Mobile Box Office is open 90 minutes before each performance, and during interval. Alternatively you can visit waso.com.au to buy online or book an in-person ticketing appointment by calling 9326 0000.



WASO in the Community



Christmas Cheer at Perth Children's Hospital

Adorned with festive headbands and shirts, and surrounded by tinsel, WASO musicians and members of the WASO Chorus performed to hundreds of patients, staff, and families at the Perth Children's Hospital in December. Organised as part of the ongoing Hospital Orchestra Project (HOP) collaboration between WASO and the School of Special Educational Needs: Medical & Mental Health, WASO performed a merry day of carols and festivities throughout the hospital.

Assistant Concertmaster, Semra Lee, and Principal 2nd Violin, Zak Rowntree, started the day by performing duets

throughout the wards – reaching the schools' classrooms, as well as children unable to leave wards. Meanwhile, the heavenly voices of the WASO Chorus rang out through the atrium as they performed festive carols. Afterwards, the musicians and Chorus combined for a Christmas concert led by performer (and WASO Crescendo Lead) Lauren Ashlea Fraser. All children were gifted a goodie bag featuring a small musical instrument to take away.

HOP events continue in 2025 with further ward visits in April.

HOP is generously supported by the Stan Perron Charitable Foundation and presented in partnership with the School of Special Educational Needs: Medical & Mental Health (Department of Education) and Starlight Children's Foundation.

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